

March 7, 2016

Senator Edward Gomes

Representative Peter Tercyak and Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Labor and Public Employees Committee

Dear Legislators,

The Naugatuck Valley Project, a community organization made up of congregations, labor and housing and other organizations in Waterbury and the Valley, and its allies recommend the passage of the Connecticut Domestic Worker's Bill of Rights S. 393 An Act concerning Domestic Workers – 2016.

S393 will bring domestic workers out of the shadows. Protecting domestic workers also protects the safety of our communities, ensures the health and wellbeing of domestic workers and their families, and strengthens the state economy by allowing more individuals to participate in the adequately paid workforce. It also provides worker job quality and stability, so that the rising number of elders and their families will receive the home care they need in order to be able to age with dignity in the community.

Background

Domestic workers have historically been viewed as outside the traditional workforce, largely because most are women, often immigrants, doing the work previously most often done by housewives and servants at home. Due to the nature of domestic work, which can include health care workers for clients who require constant supervision and so are hired as "live in," they are isolated from the rest of the workforce and subjected to round-the-clock physically demanding labor, often with little or no clear separation between work and personal time.

This is an unregulated industry that was intentionally excluded from coverage by federal labor laws, including the Fair Labor Standards Act, National Labor Relations Act, Family Medical Leave Act, and the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Yet it is still a "real job" and often a hard one demanding professionalism and dedication of the care workers who do it. They are among the most vulnerable to abuse and mistreatment of all workers, since their workplaces typically are not subject to any laws regulating job safety, wage and hour standards, or protections against discrimination, including sexual harassment.

In the 2015 Legislative Session a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights was passed that covers Subsection (e) of section 31-58 of the 2016 supplement to the general statutes. However, the Governor's Task force on Domestic Workers released a report in January 2016 that noted areas not covered, and which continue to threaten workers' safety and rights:

TA i. Three or More Employees Exemption - Remove the provision of the Domestic Workers law that require that it CHRO violations only apply to employers with three or more employees.

ii. Job Description – We want a worker to have the right to have a job description that describes responsibilities, hours, and time/days off.

iii. Paid Seventh Day Off – Live-in workers have the seventh day free and get paid for it.

iv. Notice of Termination – 30-days' notice of termination, except for cause.

v. Workers Compensation – Workers to be covered by state law once they work 16 hours for the same employer.

vi. Protection Against Labor Trafficking – Workers have the right to privacy if they work in someone's home; right to their own phone; and access to their own documents.

What We Seek

In order to prevent a threatened erosion of domestic workers' rights obtained last year (hourly wage, "hours worked"), the Connecticut Domestic Worker's Bill of Rights S. 393 An Act concerning Domestic Workers – 2016 is proposed, that would repeal the previously noted section 31-58 of the 2016 supplement to the general statutes, subsection (e), and replace it with the potential provisions of S 393, which amends Connecticut state labor law to guarantee basic work standards and protections:

- 24 hours off per 7-day calendar week;
- paid leave after one year;
- a job description;
- right to privacy;
- protection from discrimination and sexual harassment for employers of at least one worker;
- notice of termination, and
- means of enforcing these standards.

Passage of this bill would establish labor standards that protect domestic workers' basic workplace rights.

For Workers:

- safe and healthy working conditions,
- unemployment benefits,
- Paid sick time to care for themselves and their families, and

- freedom from discrimination, sexual harassment and the risk of trafficking for all workers.

For Employers: S393

- ensures that employers receive the highest quality of care for their families and homes by affording domestic workers dignity and respect.
- reduces turnover by providing greater stability for workers, and
- improves the health and safety of employers and their families by protecting domestic workers' health.

For Connecticut, S393 provides:

- **domestic workers** with safe and dignified work environments
- **employers** with clear guidelines on their responsibilities

Based on this Naugatuck Valley Project and its allies urge the Labor committee to approve and the State Legislature to pass S393, the amended Domestic Workers Bill of Rights of 2016.

Sincerely,

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